

SPIN

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The Band Next Door

Burlesque horror rockers **KAREN BLACK** believe that performance-art-as-rock'n'roll is an idea whose time has come. Art with a capital F.

"The Swinger" and "Tommy"), and of course from the films of actress Karen Black ("Five Easy Pieces" and Hitchcock's "Family Plot"), whom the LA-born Pfahler treats as a divinity.

For the most part, however, the band's act derives from characters in Kembra Pfahler's

"lumps, clots, and stringy globs," it includes a porno-spoof of a Diet Pepsi commercial and the sight of Kembra, formerly a teenage gymnast, walking on bowling balls and standing on her head, while a backup dancer breaks paint-filled eggs over her crotch in the best bombs-over-

"I think everyone should be a performance artist," says Kembra Pfahler, the mordant guiding light of New York's only avantpunkburlesque band, Karen Black, and the founder of her own artistic philosophy, Availabism—"making the best of whatever's available."

Body-painted and bewigged, and full of what cult filmmaker Mike Kuchar has called "voluptuous horror," this band is eager to supply the planet's overall decay with a baroquely funny beauty-mask solution of sound and spectacle.

Led by Kembra and her Japanese-born husband, the guitar-playing sonic boomer Samoa, Karen Black (with bassman Mat Black and drummer Zoe Walsh) hits the stage with an epic vocabulary of images drawn from the 50s horror films of Ed Wood, Jr. ("Orgy of the Dead"), from Ann-Margaret's more psychedelic performances (in



own catalogue of indisputably bizarre Super-8 films, like Abra Kadaver, the moth-like creature in the song "Neighborachie, The Boy Next Door."

The band looks like the Addams family on Halloween and sounds like a Grand Funk Butthole Surfer starring a Big Brother Eddie Van Halen. Their stage act is hilarious and messy, even a little grisly. Made of

Tokyo fashion. The band also performs an ecological "closet message" song, "Alaska," pumping out fresh air and foul oil spills.

Are these madcap cut-ups serious? "Yes," Kembra says, "but it feels funny to say it. We just try to keep that fuckin' assball rolling."

—Linda Yablonsky